

Caregiver Burnout

Providing care for an elderly or ill relative is a full-time job in itself and can become especially difficult if the caregiver is also balancing work and family responsibilities. Too often, caregivers place so much focus on their caregiving duties that they experience feelings of stress, hopelessness and helplessness. Caregivers who are suffering from burnout often feel they have no time to take care of themselves or feel guilty if they take time away from their caregiving role.

If you have found yourself in a caregiving role, chances are you will experience some periods of stress. It is important to remember to take the time you need to care for yourself. The individual receiving care will benefit more from a happy and healthy caregiver than from a stressed and burned out caregiver.

Signs of Burnout

The following are some of the most common signs of caregiver burnout:

- Anger toward the individual or other family members
- Social withdrawal, depression, sleeplessness and loss of focus
- Anxiety about the individual's future care needs and your ability to meet those needs
- General feelings of being overwhelmed along with irritability or mood swings
- Physical and mental health problems

Steps to Take

Get a diagnosis. Do not delay seeing a doctor if your mental or physical health is at risk.

Know that help is out there. Seek support from family, friends, social service agencies and your faith community. Local support groups can put you in touch with area services to help you provide the best care.

Prioritize. Make lists and establish a daily routine.

Use a respite care service you will need to take a break. When you get that break, go shopping, see a movie or enjoy an uninterrupted visit with a friend.

Take care of yourself. Watch your diet, exercise and get plenty of rest. You also still need your own hobbies and activities.

Manage stress. Be aware of how stress affects your body (stomach aches, high blood pressure) and your emotions (overeating, irritability).

Anticipate changes. Eventually your loved one will need more and more intensive kinds of care. Find out about the options now so you are ready for the changes as they occur.

- **Be realistic.** The care you give does make a difference, but many behaviors cannot be controlled. Grieve the losses, but focus on positive times as they arise and enjoy good memories.
- **Give yourself credit.** Do not feel guilty. You are only human and it is normal to lose patience or feel like your care may fall short sometimes. Keep in mind you are doing the best you can.

Here when you need us.

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